

## **Executive Summary**

The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) was granted five AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers in June of 2010. Four of these VISTAs will serve their year as Capacity Building Associates with the goal of increasing the capacity of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) that are dedicated to creating and expanding programs that ultimately bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty. This VISTA Initiative, as it will be called in the report, seeks to connect training and technical assistance resources from all over the state in an effort to build the organizational capacity of organizations that combat the varied forms of poverty. Our vision of having 'Hoosiers help Hoosiers' comes in the form of training and partnerships around various areas of capacity building assistance, such as financial management, strategic planning, board development, and more. The first step of this project was to create a Needs Assessment Survey which both found organizations to whom to provide their capacity building services and showed the areas of nonprofit management that are the most challenging for Hoosier nonprofits, thus directing the type of services they will provide. This report is a summary of the findings from this survey.

The survey consisted of 10 sections of general areas of capacity with between four and ten questions in each section. The substantive questions either reflect a basic requirement of operations or a significant achievement in capacity. The target audience was small, grassroots organizations of either faith or secular background who desire to build their capacity through the services offered by the AmeriCorps VISTA project and in some way have programs that relate to anti-poverty efforts. In total, 107 organizations took the survey and were distributed nearly evenly between faith-based and community-based organizations. Not every respondent was from a registered nonprofit with 501(c) 3 status, and not every respondent finished the survey completely. The responses to the questions were coded into numerical scores and analyzed collectively as well as by region.

The five regions are:

**Region 1:** Southeast

**Region 2:** Southwest

**Region 3:** Northwest

**Region 4:** Northeast

**Region 5:** Central

*(A map with color-coded regions is located in **Appendix A**).*

The majority of respondents came from Central and Northeast Indiana, while the fewest came from the Southeast region. The sample is not robust enough to be able to make any generalizations about the state of nonprofits in Indiana or in any particular region.

Organizations were scored individually to get an aggregate total score based on their responses. From this individual analysis, we find that of the 98 complete survey responses, five (or 5.10%) of the organizations are considered low capacity organizations based on the total points available in the survey. This is quite low, and the rest of the respondents fell nearly equally in the mid capacity or high capacity level according their scores on the categorical questionnaire of basic requirements and achievement of nonprofit management. Typically, the method of analysis was finding mean average for each category in either the regions or statewide groups. The general findings indicate higher capacities in the categories of Marketing, Organizational Assessment, and Networking and Advocacy, though there are differences among the regions. The three most challenging categories of capacity are Planning and Programming, Operations and Governance, and Human Resources. In the middle range are Financial Resources and Information Technology.

There is, however, an aspect of the survey that holds more validity and importance to the Indiana faith and community-based organizations that responded to the survey and the related stakeholders than the data collected. The most intriguing findings surface in the large discrepancies between the answers that the organizations gave to their personal rankings of the eight areas of capacity and the data drawn from the categorical scores. The differences in ranking of the self-reported needs and the categorical scores, as discussed above, show an issue in perception. Though there are

reasons that may account for some of this discrepancy based on the context of the survey and the definitions of the terms, the findings indicate that many of the participating nonprofit leaders may not have a realistic perception of their organizational capacity.

Without a critical outside perspective, these organizations may be approaching building capacity in a less effective way. This critical finding influences the goals of the whole project. What is first needed is to help nonprofit leaders understand the complexity of capacity building. It is not solely about getting more money to expand programs as the respondents seem to indicate in their responses. Our role as VISTAs is to then bring an outsider's perspective to their operations because for many grassroots organizations, the tasks related to building capacity are too time-consuming when there are far too many daily and urgent needs for the mere operation of the organization.

This survey does not, in the least, find blame in the nonprofit leaders for any degree of this perception issue, but it is the responsibility of the organizations in conjunction with all the stakeholders in this nonprofit community—governments, funders, trainers, businesses, etc.—to work together to solve the problems of capacity. The OFBCI VISTA Initiative hopes to connect these stakeholders and build capacity through partnership, research, and a shared passion for serving the public good.